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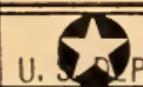
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U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Market your
range cattle
in the
best condition



U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

AWI-55

MARKET YOUR CATTLE EARLY

High cattle numbers and short feed supplies now constitute a threat to maximum beef production throughout the West.

Cattle in the 17 Western States on January 1, 1943, numbered 34,638,000 head—near an all-time high.

Range forage production was exceptionally good in both 1941 and 1942. But the western hay and grain reserves for livestock were drawn down materially in those 2 years, and by the spring of 1943 had practically vanished. The full production for 1943 is still to be made and that for 1944 cannot be foreseen.

This situation constitutes a threat to continued high production. How can it be met?

A timely element in the answer is early marketing of animals in good condition.

Leading stockmen of the West are advocating a marketing program even more liberal than that recommended in the present marketing goals. This will accomplish three things:

1. It will provide increased meat supplies urgently needed this year.
2. It will help adjust the remaining numbers of livestock to the local supplies of range and farm feeds.
3. It will assure for next year and the next a sustained maximum range forage production; which means a sustained maximum livestock production.

KEEP UP MAXIMUM RANGE BEEF PRODUCTION

The western range region supplies nearly one-third of the live weight of cattle and calves grown in the United States.

To meet the needs for meat for our armed forces, war workers and other civilians, and our allies, the western range must continue to produce the maximum of which it is capable. How can this be done?

In the range country maximum livestock production depends primarily on adjustment of animal numbers to the available forage growth and prompt disposal of marketable animals.

In wartime, when maximum livestock production is needed, there is the temptation to place more animals on the range, to hold marketable animals there until they reach the best bloom or finish possible on grass, to bolster overgrazed range forage with costly supplemental feed, or to wait out the market for a higher price.

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Maximum production of beef and veal cannot be met by turning more cattle onto range already fully stocked. And in the West there is little possibility of heavier supplementary feeding, for such feed is growing scarcer.

Maximum forage growth from range lands can be attained over the years only by proper grazing each year.

Under the circumstances careful sustained production requires early marketing of the livestock, when it is at top weight for the forage you have on the range.

Many factors other than feed influence time of marketing, such as transportation, price, and other urgent farm work, but with the tight forage and feed situation of the West generally, as early marketing as possible is essential.

WHEN TO MARKET CATTLE

To market the maximum weight of beef and the maximum calf crop annually per unit of forage available, ranch operators must do two things:

1. Never allow their range to be overstocked. Overstocking damages the range, lowers live weights, and endangers next year's gains.

2. Remove sale cattle from the range before their rate of gain slackens materially, certainly before losses in weight occur.

In other words, give the cattle the best chance to make top gains; and then market them to the best advantage. If drought or other cause prevents expected gains, market the animals at once. Normally watch for the time when cattle reach the peak condition. This, of course, will vary. In the West it depends on such factors as type of range, age of animals, current forage-growth conditions, degree of stocking, and supplemental feeding.

IN THE NORMAL YEARS

In a normal year, dispose of your sale animals, including those from close culling of breeding herds, in summer or fall when they are grass fat.

In general, a close relationship exists between rapid gains and the "green-feed" period. Holding cattle on the range until their average daily gain is very small wastes forage that should have formed (1) your reserve for later use, (2) winter protection to the crowns of palatable grasses, or (3) even litter for protecting and enriching the soil.

Use good judgment, of course—avoid the excessive shrink in market weight sometimes suffered from marketing cattle too early.

There is no hard and fast rule. Being "market wise" means using forethought and watching carefully the condition of animals and forage. Succulence of the forage, the rate of gain on the animals or their nearness to losing flesh, the hardness of their finish, and similar factors must all be studied from week to week.

WHEN DROUGHTS COME

Experienced western-range stockmen now generally recognize that it is good business to carry a margin of safety in forage and feed supplies. These reserves provide insurance against excessive death losses and

the loss of condition in the cattle when periodic droughts occur, or when an abnormally cold winter or late spring arrives without warning as in parts of the West in 1943.

In times of serious drought, it is good business to move market animals off the range early, in order to sell them while in reasonably good condition, to save forage for the breeding herd, and to avoid excessive damage to the range itself.

SEASONAL GAINS IN DIFFERENT REGIONS

The following information on seasonal cattle gains from the investigations of Federal and State agencies provides a guide to aid ranchmen in judging when to market their cattle.

On the Northern Great Plains

In normal years on conservatively grazed range in this area, cattle gain well through September, but tend to lose weight early in October. It may well pay to hold steers until the end of September (fig. 1).

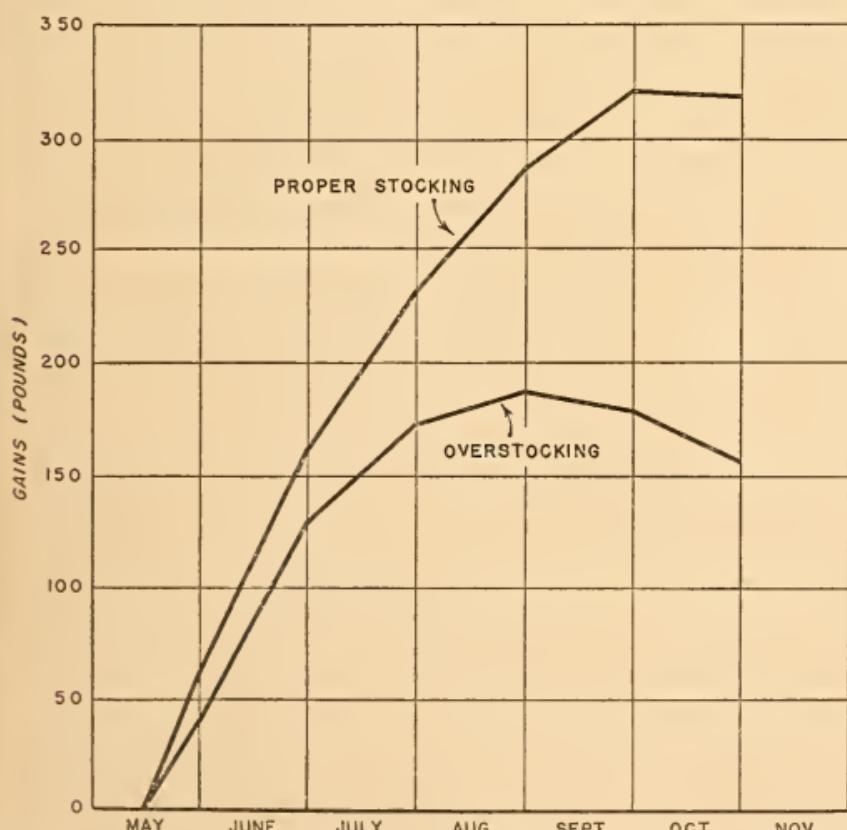


FIGURE 1.—Gains of 2-year-old steers in the northern Great Plains on conservatively grazed range reached a peak in early October; on overstocked range, late in August. These are average monthly weighings from 1916 to 1935 at the Northern Great Plains Field Station, Mandan, N. Dak.

In dry years, such as 1939, weight gains will not justify holding cattle on the range longer than early September.

On heavily grazed or overstocked ranges, maximum gains do not hold up beyond late August; the cattle must be marketed at that time to avoid losses. (See fig. 1.)

At the U. S. Range Livestock Experiment Station, Miles City, Mont., on typical short-grass range, dry cows gained rapidly from mid-May through June into early July, at the rate of 2 to 3 pounds per day. Thereafter, as the forage became drier, gains fell to something like half a pound a day until early Septem-

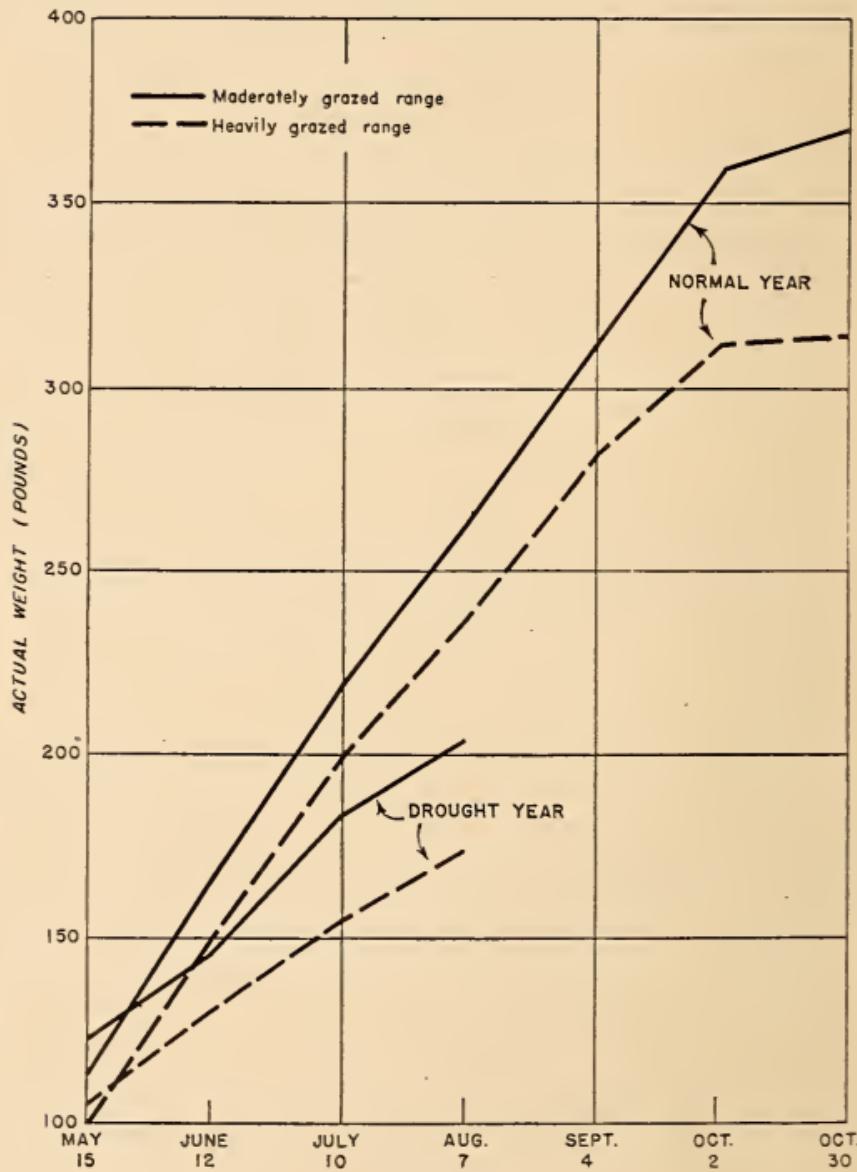


FIGURE 2.—Actual weights of calves gained rapidly in a normal year, but lagged badly and forced early sales in a drought year. In both these years (1935 and 1936) at the U. S. Range Livestock Experiment Station, Miles City, Mont., the conservatively grazed range consistently produced much heavier calves. In the good year, proper marketing time was late September; in the drought year, early August.

ber. Holding them longer proved wasteful. During the late summer and fall, weights were barely held and frequently decreased.

Cows with calves also gained rapidly during May and June, but later lost some weight even where they had ample forage. Weight losses were more pronounced by mid-September.

Calves, except in drought years, reached maximum weights at the Miles City station in late October, but might more profitably have been marketed earlier (fig. 2). On conservatively grazed range, calves were heavier, continued moderate gains for a longer period, and could be marketed later than on overgrazed range.

Similar results with various classes of cattle have been obtained on State and Federal experimental range areas in northern Montana, South Dakota, Nebraska, and northeastern Colorado (fig. 3).

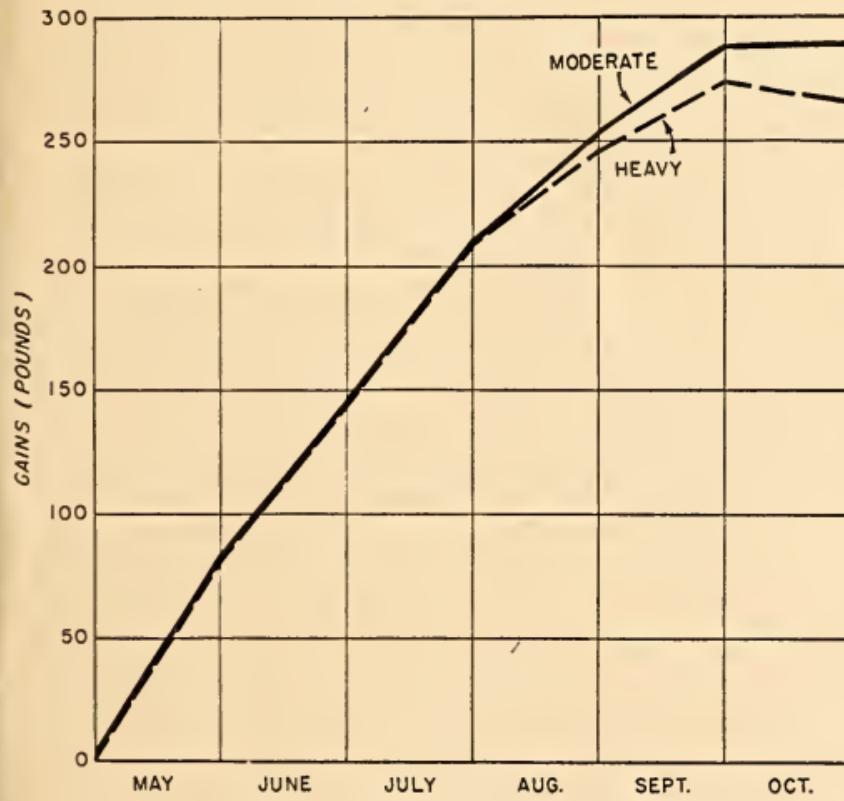


FIGURE 3.—The average gains of yearlings for the 3 years 1940-42 in the central plains of northern Colorado slowed down on the heavily grazed range early in August and showed an actual loss in weight in October. The moderately grazed animals should have been marketed by the end of September, the slightly greater weights in October notwithstanding. (Rocky Mountain Forest and Range Experiment Station.)

On the Southern Great Plains

Most rapid gains are made during the green-forage period from mid-April or May to mid-July. In years with late rains, worth-while gains are resumed in the late summer and may continue for a month or more.

This is well illustrated in the growth of steers and heifers during the first 30 months of their life at the Sonora substation of the Texas Agricultural Experiment Station (fig. 4).

In the Southwest

Gains in cattle weight are made mainly through July, August, and September, the rainy season in this region. On normal range, sales may even be delayed until the middle of October. Thereafter there are few gains and probable shrinkage.

On overgrazed range, peak weights are obtained earlier, and shrinkage is more rapid than on conservatively stocked range.

Animals wintered on the range and held for spring sale should ordinarily be disposed of before the critical dry spring period when forage is short, little or no grass grows and serious losses in weight occur. The occasional but unpredictable wet spring with high forage production is not a dependable provider of range forage.

The Arizona Experiment Station found, during a 5-year period, that calves made greatest gains generally from July to October, inclusive, with a marked leveling off in November (fig. 5). Feeding cottonseed cake to cows during the winter was of slight benefit in the calf weights, and then only in some years. Calf weights were considerably lower in drought years.

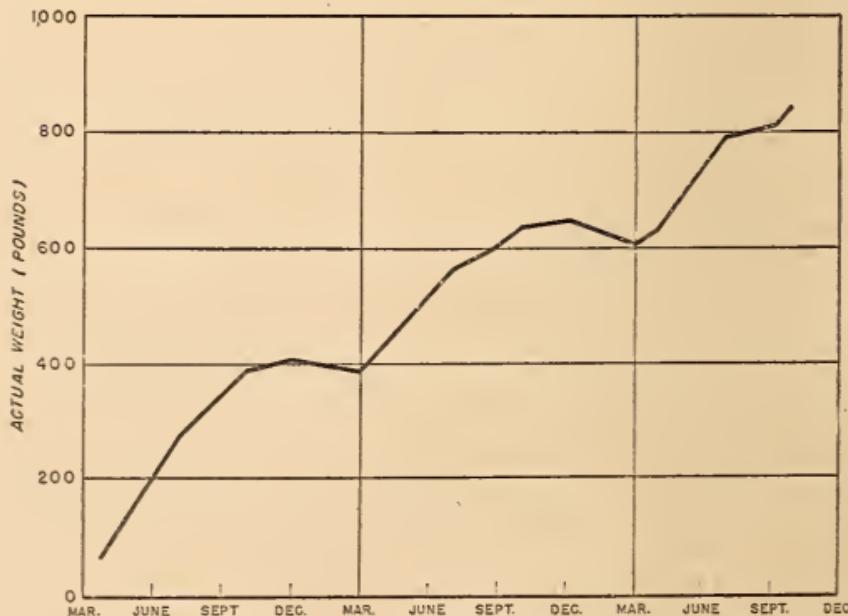


FIGURE 4.—Successive weighings of these Texas cattle for 30 months from birth follow the same general annual pattern, maximums coming about mid-October, most rapid gains from mid-April to mid-July. Losses in mid-January to early March were suffered in both years shown. (Sonora substation, Texas Agricultural Experiment Station.)

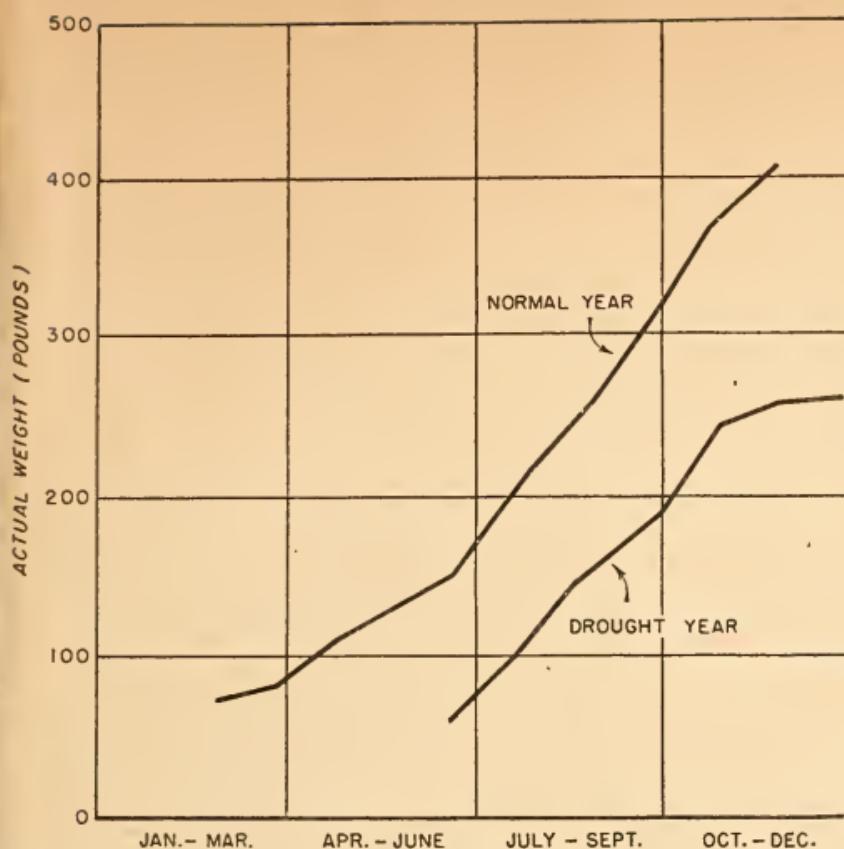


FIGURE 5.—Weights of calves in Arizona in a good year (1937) and a drought year (1934) exhibit most rapid gains in the midsummer forage period, regardless of the great differences in total weight. In the drought year it was inadvisable to keep the animals beyond this period. (Arizona Agricultural Experiment Station.)

In the Intermountain Region

On conservatively grazed mountain ranges in the Intermountain region cattle gained normally until mid-September or early October.

On heavily stocked mountain brush range in southern Utah, however, very slow gains were made by dry cows and yearlings after July, when the grass forage was fully grazed and only the less palatable brush was left (fig. 6). Calves gained steadily until October 1, but at the expense of their mothers.

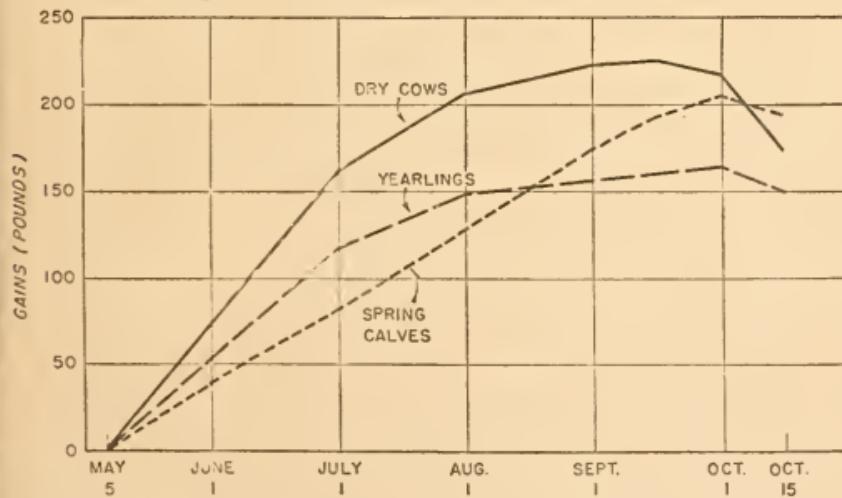


FIGURE 6.—On a heavily grazed brush range in southwestern Utah, yearlings and dry cows made very slow gains after July. Only the spring calves held the same rate of gain through to October. (Intermountain Forest and Range Experiment Station, Utah, 1922-25.)

In the Pacific Northwest

On high summer ranges, where the forage begins to dry by mid-August or early September and cattle gains taper off, midsummer round-ups should be considered for disposal of animals reaching best condition at that time.

In southeastern Oregon, on the high desert, where rains are very light and consequently green forage is scant or absent from June to August, cattle make best gains before July and are largely disposed of then as stockers or feeders.

In California

On mountain ranges in California, maximum weights make marketing advisable on the average by mid-September (fig. 7). However, in the dry year of 1939, practically no cow gains were made on an experimental range after August 10.

On foothill ranges in the Great Central Valley, where the forage is mainly annual plants, rains come and forage starts some time after October 1. The most rapid growth period and the best forage is in the spring during March and April. Gains taper off as the forage dries during June and July, and cattle to be marketed should be sold by then. Losses occur in August.

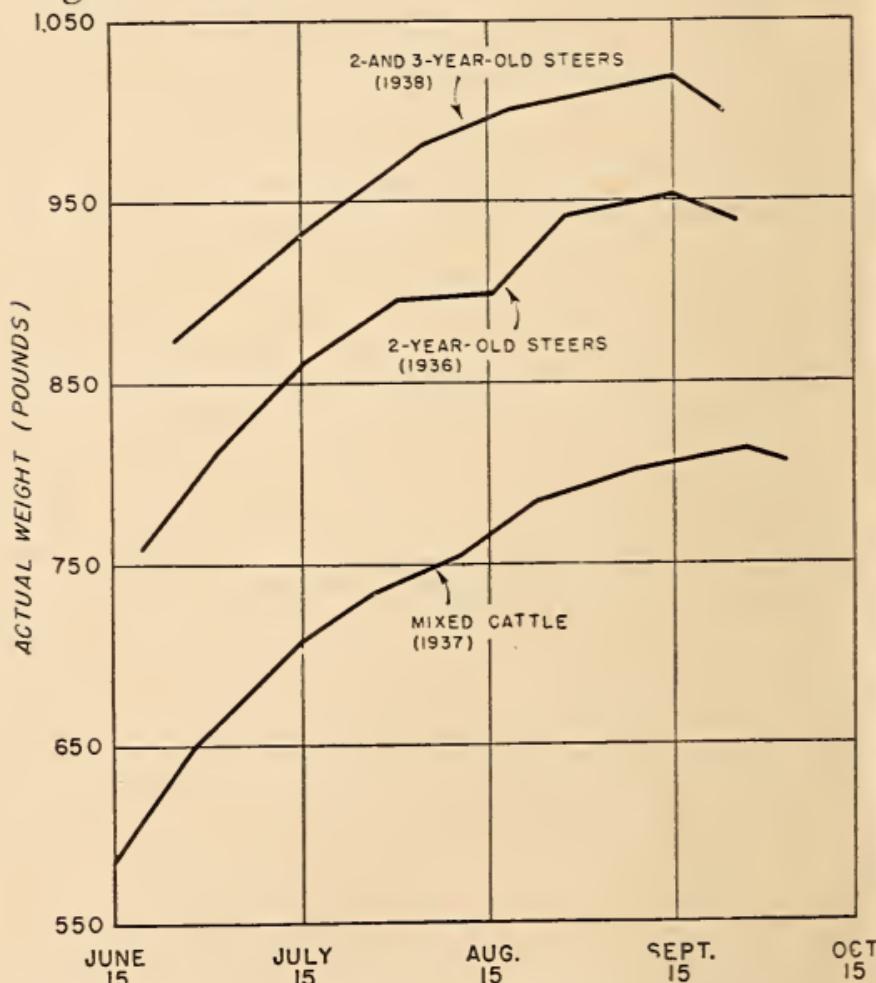


FIGURE 7.—Actual weights of three groups of cattle in the Lassen National Forest, Calif., slackened after mid-July as forage dried, with actual losses in the latter part of September. (California Forest and Range Experiment Station, 1940-41.)

On the San Joaquin Experimental Range it was found practicable to maintain the breeding herd in thrifty condition yearlong by supplemental feeding to make up for the protein deficiencies of the range forage during the dry summer season. Such feeding resulted in higher calf crops and earlier calves that weighed 430 to 500 pounds when weaned at 7 to 8 months of age.

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